

Pentecost

Today at Pentecost, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on all believers. What does Pentecost mean for us today? What new insights might we gain from looking at Pentecost through the lens of Reconciliation week?

I'm sure you've heard the idiom that if you want a different result, you have to do things differently. Yet it is interesting that so often people who want to bring about improvements continue to do the same things - maybe we try harder, or to streamline the process or to work more efficiently, but if we just do the same thing, we will not get a different result. We need an intervention or a different approach. Pentecost is God's intervention: a breakthrough in our human capacity to enable all believers to grasp and experience God's activity in a fresh way, even as we know that God is and has always been active in all of creation.

Jesus' followers were gathered together to celebrate Shavuot or Jewish Pentecost. This would have been the larger group of disciples - not just the remaining eleven men, but the women, probably some of their children and no doubt some of the early believers. The Hebrew festival is a harvest festival and also remembers when God first gave the Law at Mount Sinai to Moses recorded in Exodus 19.

You may recall that it was very dramatic with thunder and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, but they stayed at a distance, at the foot of the mountain which was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire.

The people were afraid and trembled and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin."

We see that the people were afraid of this display of God's power while Moses, who already has developed a personal relationship with the Lord, reassures them of God's positive intent - to keep the people from a life of sin and separation from God. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the leaders and prophets had more of a representational role and the Spirit only came upon specific people for specific purposes.

The loud sound *like the rush of a violent wind*, and tongues of fire in Acts 2 would have brought all this to mind for the disciples who had gathered to celebrate: Mount Sinai would have been on their minds as well as wondering when Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit would be fulfilled. But something new was happening here too! **Each of the believers** was filled with God's spirit and enabled to speak in other languages. This part of the narrative can cause some division amongst Christians today. Some Christians feel very uncomfortable

when we talk about speaking in other languages in the Spirit, or 'tongues' as it is often called.

My understanding is two-fold: firstly, the Spirit had a specific purpose that day for these



Galilean disciples to be able to communicate with the Jewish people who had gathered from across the known world and so spoke different languages. Suddenly they could hear the Gospel message in their own heart language. And their response was swift and widespread- over 3,000 people put their trust in Jesus as Messiah that day!

Peter's explanation in Acts 2 is that this is a fulfillment of the prophet Joel, that in the last days God's Spirit would be poured out, with one of the results being "prophecy," or speaking forth God's words. The events of Acts 2 are the result of God's Spirit at work. **There is a new revelation happening.** Jerusalem has become the location of re-creating Mount Sinai and the words of the disciples are a new word from God. This is not a negation and replacement of the Law of Moses. It is rather a fulfillment of the hopes of the Torah and the Prophets, a fulfillment of the hopes of the Jewish people in the appearance of the Messiah, and this calls for a new word from on high.

My second understanding of the Spirit coming on all believers is that the Spirit is **given to us as a common gift and equips us for to live as Jesus taught.**

Jesus says this in today's gospel, John 14: ¹⁵ *'if you love me, you will keep my commandments.* ¹⁶ *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever".*

An advocate is someone who stands by us, to guide and advise us, to point us in the best way to proceed in tricky situations. We might need an advocate in a matter of law, or to stand up for us when we need a 'stronger voice'- so we have disability advocates and an ombudsman operates as an advocate in telecommunication or other commercial disputes. We need the Spirit to guide and empower us to live as Jesus says, keeping his commandments.

There is a **definite individuality about the gifts given** and the way we exercise them. This is clearly taught in 1Corinthian 12 and 14 as well as Romans 12. **Some Christians willingly embrace the spiritual language of prayer,** while others may have different gifts. We **do not need to fear God's gifts** as they are given to build us up and to enable us to live in God's peace. As Jesus said, in ²⁷ *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid"*

When we view Pentecost through the lens of reconciliation, we see how much we have to learn from our first nations brothers and sisters. We are called to reset our values, our aims

and intentions. We set our priority on not just knowing and serving God individually, but we are called to actively work together as one, across different cultures or language groups knowing that we are reconciled with God and seeking to be reconciled with each other. God made us all in divine likeness, gave all believers our saviour, Jesus Christ and fills all believers with the Holy Spirit.

May we each heed the call to **listen deeply – to become aware of God’s presence in the natural world, the Great Creator Spirit** who has been active across this country for so many thousands of years and whose presence has been acknowledged in differing ways by our first nations people.

But reconciliation goes deeper than this! In order to enable healing and true reconciliation, we have to confront the dreadful travesties committed against the original peoples and the way that these form the basis of our own privilege today. It’s one thing to agree that the sins of our forebears were dreadful- it is a whole new level to acknowledge that I have benefitted from this, that my position of privilege continues because others are kept down. We begin to deeply question how we can bring about change. This year’s National Reconciliation Week theme is **‘Be Brave, Make a Change’**



How can we individually and at St Mary’s participate in the Spirit’s work? How can we be brave and make the changes that allow God to bring reconciliation and healing? One simple thing that Aunty Phyllis said on Friday was simply to make friends with our Gunai Kurnai brothers and sisters.

May our prayer this reconciliation season be:

Lord God, bring us together as one, reconciled, healed, forgiven, sharing you with others as you have called us to do. In Jesus Christ, let us be together as one. Amen.